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The Domestic Conditions and Influence of U.S. Foreign Policy on Guatemalan Emigration.

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Abstract

Guatemalan emigration to the U.S. is largely motivated by domestic conditions including corruption, impunity, land rights, drug gangs and the 2008 economic recession.

Guatemala's living conditions and development trajectory interact with past and current American policy to the detriment of the population in poverty. Some Washington policies favor development in Guatemala (*e.g.*, USAID funded projects) but others such as the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), anti-drug, and immigration policies may unintentionally hinder development and encourage emigration. Scholars identify economics, ethnic inequality and weak government as motivating people to leave Guatemala, but it is unclear how Washington's policies might interact with or exacerbate these factors (Bandow 1985; Ellerman 2005; and Krznaric 2006). This paper argues that the \$736,000,000 in development aid the U.S. has provided to Guatemala since 2008 is not benefiting the people that it targets, which is why they may be emigrating. How do immigrants explain their reasons for leaving? How are these reasons related to U.S. policies, if at all? What is the role of US policy in Guatemala's emigration? This is a single case study combining research on Guatemala with personal interviews of emigrants in the U.S. and in Guatemala, using snowball sampling. To understand the impact of American aid for development on the people, the study includes a review of USAID investment in Guatemala. The study further backs up what other scholars have found, that economic and ethnic inequality motivates emigrants to seek a better life in the United States.